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The Community Juvenile Accountability Act: Research-Proven Interventions for the Juvenile Courts

Legislative Direction

The 1997 Washington State Legislature significantly altered this state's juvenile offender sentencing laws and intervention policies (E2SHB 3900). One portion of the legislation established the Community Juvenile Accountability Act (CJAA). The Act changed the way some local court programs are funded—only programs shown to reduce recidivism cost-effectively are funded under the CJAA.

As far as we know, no other state has attempted to implement research-proven, cost-effective intervention programs for juvenile offenders on a statewide basis. The law calls for a concerted effort between state and local entities. Since the law's passage, the following have occurred:

- Five programs were initially selected from a review of national research. These programs demonstrated recidivism reductions in small sample studies elsewhere.
- The juvenile courts, the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA), and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) carefully studied the feasibility of implementing these five programs in Washington State.
- Two programs were selected by the juvenile courts.
- To ensure program quality, a strong emphasis has been placed on training and consultation from the program developers.

In the Act, the Institute was charged with measuring whether the CJAA programs cost-effectively reduce recidivism in Washington State. The question is whether these two programs—which to date have only been tried on a small scale elsewhere in the United States—can reduce recidivism and net criminal justice costs when implemented in multiple courts throughout Washington. The key aspects of the Act are summarized in this paper.

Research-Proven Programs

The Institute examined national research literature from the last two decades to identify programs that reduced recidivism by juvenile offenders and relied on a strong research design. Five programs were identified from this review:

- Functional Family Therapy (James Alexander, Ph.D.);
- Aggression Replacement Training (Arnold Goldstein, Ph.D. and Barry Glick Ph.D.);
- Multi-Systemic Therapy (Scott Henggeler, Ph.D.);
- Adolescent Mentoring (William Davidson, Ph.D.); and
- Interagency Coordination (Patrick Tolan, Ph.D.).

After presentations by the program designers and review by the state juvenile court administrators during the fall of 1998, two programs were selected by the courts: Functional Family Therapy (FFT) by 14 courts and Aggression Replacement Training (ART) by 23 courts.

Functional Family Therapy is a three-phase program that works with the families of juvenile offenders to reduce delinquency risk factors. The first phase is designed to motivate the family toward change. The second phase teaches the family how to change a specific critical problem identified in the first phase. The final phase helps the family generalize their problem-solving skills. An individual therapist works with each family at their home over a 10- to 12-week period. FFT costs about \$2,500 per family.

The program was originally developed by James Alexander, Ph.D., at the University of Utah. Thomas Sexton, Ph.D., of the University of Nevada and Rich Harris of the Clark County Utah Youth and Family Services are working with Dr. Alexander to implement this program in Washington State.

Aggression Replacement Training is a ten-week educational program conducted with groups of eight to ten juvenile offenders meeting three times a week. The program includes three components taught each week: anger management, moral reasoning, and problem-solving skills. Youth are expected to learn to substitute pro-social thinking and behavioral skills for aggressive and other anti-social activities. ART costs about \$500 per youth.

ART was originally developed by Arnold Goldstein, Ph.D., at the University of Syracuse and Barry Glick, Ph.D., from the New York State Division for Youth. ART is being implemented in Washington State by Barry Glick.

Maintaining Program Fidelity: Training and Support

Even programs with solid frameworks and demonstrated success, like FFT and ART, face hurdles when transferred to a new location. To overcome these obstacles, the following training and consultation is being provided to the courts through JRA contracts:

- Initial training by program developers to program providers;
- Weekly or bi-monthly phone consultations with program developers; and
- Site visits to the courts to increase the proficiencies of providers.

JRA is also working with the courts to establish a support network of program providers for ongoing quality review and self-evaluation. In addition, a three-month test period will allow time for program development before the evaluation begins.

Defining the Eligible Population: Risk Assessment

Juvenile offender programs that target youth at low risk for re-offending have repeatedly been found ineffective in reducing recidivism. This finding coincides with the adage that you cannot fix what may not be broken. To be cost-effective, programs typically need to target moderate- to high-risk youth.

Recognizing this principle, the Institute worked with the Washington State Association of Juvenile Court Administrators to develop and implement a statewide risk assessment to determine eligibility for a CJAA program. This assessment targets those risk and protective factors shown in the research literature to be related to continued juvenile offending. The CJAA programs are focused on youth with specific risk profiles.

Functional Family Therapy is a program for moderate- to high-risk youth with significant family problems. Aggression Replacement Training is for moderate- to high-risk youth having problems with aggression and/or a high anti-social attitude and low social skills.

Measuring Program Effectiveness

The ideal evaluation design uses a random assignment of eligible participants to a control or program group. Since this design is not feasible in many court settings, the evaluation will use the next most reliable design: the *waiting line* design. This approach takes advantage of the fact that resources limit the number of youth who can immediately enter a program.

In this design, all youth will be assessed for program eligibility. Youth who meet the selection criteria will be put into the program. When the program reaches capacity, remaining eligible youth will be placed in the control group. As openings occur in the programs, recently adjudicated eligible youth will be placed in the program. Control group youth will receive traditional probation services.

EVALUATION EVENT	DATE
Six-month trial period for CJAA programs starts.	January 1999
Evaluation of fully-implemented programs starts.	July 1999
<i>First report on implementation and changes in risk and protective factors.</i>	December 1999
Sufficient numbers of youth in control and program groups are reached.	January 2000
Re-offense follow-up period for control and program group youth starts.	January 2000
<i>Second report on implementation and changes in risk and protective factors.</i>	December 2000
Six-month recidivism measurement period ends.	July 2001
<i>Third report on six-month recidivism.</i>	December 2001
Twelve-month recidivism measurement period ends.	January 2002
Eighteen-month recidivism measurement period ends.	July 2002
<i>Final report on 18-month recidivism.</i>	December 2002

Because of the small number of program youth in each court, recidivism-reduction impacts cannot be measured in individual courts. Youth will be pooled across courts for a statewide evaluation.

Within six months of program implementation, 271 youth are expected to be in FFT programs and 743 youth in ART programs across the state. Assuming the control groups can be filled at the same rate, the statewide samples will be large enough to detect whether the intervention significantly reduces recidivism rates.

The principle outcome measure required by the legislation is recidivism.¹ Program effectiveness will be expressed as the difference between the program and control group recidivism rates at the end of the follow-up period. Preliminary six-month recidivism rates will be calculated in the fall of 2001; final 18-month rates will be available in December 2002.

The evaluation will also compare changes in risk and protective factors between the beginning and end of program participation.² These results will provide each court with early feedback on program effectiveness.

The Office of the Administrator for the Courts Justice Information System will be the data source for estimating recidivism rates.

For further information, contact Robert Barnoski at (360) 586-2744.

¹ *Standards for Improving Research Effectiveness in Adult and Juvenile Justice*, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 1997. A minimum of 18 months of re-offense follow-up time is necessary to reasonably capture juvenile recidivism events. An additional 12 months are necessary to allow for the criminal justice system to process these events. Therefore, at least 30 months must pass from release into the community to fully describe juvenile recidivism. Juvenile offenders prosecuted in adult criminal court and juvenile offenders who turn 18 years old before the end of the follow-up period should be tracked forward into the adult criminal justice system.

² Reassessment will be completed by the juvenile court staff, not the program provider.